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Press Release

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Proactive approach keeping rural Alaska warm

Anchorage, Alaska – A state program designed to ensure that rural Alaska communities have an adequate supply of home-heating fuel is headed into its second successful year.

The Fuel Watch program is an initiative of Governor Sean Parnell that was implemented by the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development through its Division of Community and Regional Affairs. Fuel Watch came about as a proactive approach to preventing the kind of seasonal hardship that fuel shortages caused in many rural communities in the winter and early spring of 2009.

To date, DCRA staff have made hundreds of phone calls to communities around the state to verify that fuel supplies are in order for the upcoming winter. In the program's first year, DCRA staff made more than 1,500 phone calls and assisted 200 communities prior to the onset of winter. Alaska villages saw a significantly reduced number of fuel shortages than were experienced a year earlier.

"Fuel Watch is an excellent example of the proactive and supportive relationship our department strives to develop with communities throughout Alaska. Working to prevent another crisis situation is a much better use of state resources than responding to an actual crisis," said Susan Bell, commissioner of the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development. "Alaskans will be better prepared this winter because of the dedication of Division of Community and Regional Affairs staff."

DCRA officials are also working with fuel delivery companies and rural communities to identify where assistance may be needed. Communities with limited financial resources are being encouraged to apply for financing through state loan programs.

"Ensuring that rural families stay warm in the winter is part of our division's mission to promote healthy and safe communities," said DCRA Director Tara Jollie. "It is not too early to start thinking about the coming winter. When we take steps to avoid an emergency, it is a win-win situation for everyone involved."

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